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SUBJECT: BUYER BEWARE: THE PERILS OF GIFT DIPLOMACY IN

GUYANA

REFS: A) GEORGETOWN 130, B) 05GEORGETOWN 947

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: Like many of its Caribbean neighbors, Guyana receives various high-profile gifts from countries pursuing diplomatic objectives, most notably Cuba and the People's Republic of China (PRC). Despite initial fanfare and high-profile media attention, however, many of these offers are proving ill-placed, shoddy, or unsustainable. U.S. aid has a greater impact, but struggles to win the public relations battle with such "gift diplomacy". END SUMMARY.

Havana Daydreamin': Eye Care, Scholarships Fail to Impress

12. (U) The most visible "gift diplomacy" efforts have been Cuban eye care and science scholarships (ref A). Letters to newspapers from patients in the program frequently praise the effort. Nevertheless, several recent news stories have begun to chip away at the image of Cuban largesse. The independent Kaieteur News reported in early June that as many as five hundred Guyanese eye patients have yet to recover from surgeries performed in Cuba last year and that some have undergone surgeries again locally to correct what the Cuban doctors did. The irony was not lost in Guyana when Dr. Roger Luncheon (Head of the Presidential Secretariat and President Jagdeo's deputy) recently sought

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emergency eye care in the U.S. rather than Cuba.

13. (U) The newspaper also reported that a Guyanese student in Cuba had his scholarship suspended at the GoG's request - - because of doubts regarding his parents' political loyalties. The response to a new batch of Cuban scholarships announced in February has been underwhelming. Local media report that few Guyanese students have signed up for these scholarships, more than 300 of which remain unfilled. President Jagdeo urged more students to apply during a recent campaign visit to the Corentyne region.

Made in China: White Elephant Convention Center

14. (U) The PRC funded the most recent addition to the Georgetown skyline, a USD five million convention center (ref B). The Chinese laborers brought to Guyana to work on the project completed their work in late 2005. Since then, the Office of the President (OP) has held several high-profile events there, which have been near-fiascos due to a various technical difficulties:

-- The kick-off of the national Information Communication Technology (ICT) strategy in March was delayed nearly two hours because the audio-visual system did not work. Local staff were observed feverishly trying to change the display on the main hall's monitor, the instructions for which were written in Chinese. Complicating matters further, the convention center's electrical outlets are designed for Chinese plugs.

-- A problem with the air conditioning system during the Presidential Summit on Private Sector Development in May left the VIP audience sweltering.

-- Most recently, a problem with the lighting at the convention center forced the GoG to move the June 19 meeting of Rio Group trade ministers to the Japanese-built CARICOM Secretariat building next door.

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-- The OP, which operates the convention center, has told Post that it is currently holding off scheduling any more events there, citing a lack of furniture in most of the break-out rooms.

Comment

15. (SBU) U.S. aid to Guyana focuses on areas such as improving democracy and governance, spurring exports and economic growth, and preventing and treating HIV/AIDS. Bilateral assistance will total about USD 30 million in 2006 -- over 3 percent of Guyana's GDP. Broad debt relief packages over the past two years have also provided a massive boost. All of these programs generate tremendous benefits for Guyanese, but fail to garner the same headlines or GoG appreciation as Chinese or Cuban "gifts" do. The GoG accepts their dollar diplomacy with open arms and not a trace of concern about their repressive regimes. On the

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other hand, the GoG greets assistance from the U.S., Canada and Europe assistance simply by asking for more. Despite extremely limited PD resources, Post has taken steps to counteract this with enhanced publicity for U.S. aid programs. END COMMENT.

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